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ABSTRACT

The results of an evaluation of the Florida Statewide Course Numbering System (SCNS) are discussed. Surveys were conducted with the institutional liaison officers to SCNS, as well as with faculty members and department chairs. The uniform course numbering system is designed to enhance articulation, particularly the efficient movement of students from the public community colleges to the state universities of Florida. Computerized academic advising systems have been helpful, especially for transfer students who wish to evaluate comparable courses at different institutions. Attention is directed to the following types of usage of SCNS products and services: admissions and registration, articulation and course comparability, creation of a community of scholars, counseling and advisement, curriculum analysis, funding methods and student costs regional analysis and course comparability, and maximizing student course transfers. It is claimed that the most deficient areas of usage of SCNS materials occurs at the department level. Only 7 percent of the total faculty respondents to the evaluation survey indicated they had ever used the microfiche of the course inventory and discipline taxonomies. (SW)

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ARTICULATION OUTCOMES FROM USE OF THE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES OF THE FLORIDA STATEWIDE COURSE NUMBERING SYSTEM

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This paper is based on information compiled for an evaluation study of the Statewide Course Numbering System (SCNS). Data were collected in the summer of 1981. Reports of actual usage of SCNS outputs were solicited from persons in Florida who had earlier requested some product or service from the SCNS staff. These reports had to describe usage; testimonial statements were included only if actual usage was evident. A variety of other postsecondary documents were searched which might reveal usage of SCNS data outputs. The reports of usage appear in Chapter V of the final report.

Two surveys were conducted. The first was of the contact persons at each community college or university, i.e., of the Institutional Liaison Officers to SCNS. The second survey was of long-term university faculty members of course numbering discipline task forces; they constituted about one-third of this survey group. The second set, comprising the remaining two-thirds of the group, consisted of department chairpersons who had attended the State University System workshops for new department heads and deans. The survey items relating to usage appear in Chapter VI of the evaluation report. The data and research methods can be found in the various chapters and appendices of the final report which will be available through the ERIC system in a few months.

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Use of SCNS Course Identifiers

One of the primary goals of statewide course numbering was and is the creation of a uniform numbering system which would enhance articulation, which it would do by making it possible for anyone to determine whether a transferring student would be required to re-enroll in course work completed successfully at a different institution. The focus was to be on the efficient movement of students from the public community colleges to the state universities in Florida. The implication was that all 37 public institutions had to be using the same prefixes and numbers for the same courses. And, it was further assumed that the receiving institutions would accept automatically for credit a large variety of courses if the receiving institution offered the same courses. Have these articulation benefits been realized? The answer seems to be a qualified yes; following are some of the reports found which supports this qualified positive judgment.

Two previously conducted studies were found and reviewed for this evaluation. The first comes from a sample of students, faculty, and administrators at Florida State University in 1978-1979. The students felt positively about course numbering, it was those who had transferred between universities who were most positive of SCNS. (The faculty and administrators in the sample indicated very little support for SCNS.)

The second study came from Santa Fe Community College (SFCC): it was conducted by Russell Gilbert of the fall 1978 transfer students to the SUS. He conducted an analysis of the courses which the SFCC transfers took the first term after moving to the nine state universities. He found that only one-quarter of the one percent (0.25%, or 12) courses of all SUS courses taken were unexplained duplicate course enrollments. Although these results are only from one such study, they

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are important beyond the statistical results because of the proximity of Santa Fe to the University of Florida and the very high transfer rate between them. This university has enrollment caps on many of its programs, which are listed in the Articulation Agreement, thus placing it in the position of being able to be fairly selective of its transfer students. (The study undoubtedly indicates that Santa Fe administrators, counselors, and faculty were working very hard to make sure that there transferring students were counseled and advised realistically.)

The need for better counseling and advising systems in Florida's community colleges and universities has led to some new technologies. It is the availability of new computer programs, the uniform numbers for all courses at Florida's public institutions, and the skills of professional staff which have led to the development of recently computerized academic advising systems. Two such systems were found during the evaluation study. The first, and oldest, apparently, is at Miami-Dade Community College. Its system provides the student with a full array of transfer opportunities by displaying lists of (comparable) courses by institutions. The Miami-Dade staff are so committed to this system that they even equated the courses of private institutions in their region. Miami-Dade is a large supplier of transfer students to seven of the nine universities; it will be interesting to see if these transfer students are better informed about the benefits of statewide course numbering than are the university administrators and faculty.

The University of Florida began experimenting with a computerized academic advising system this year. It lists the courses required for graduation which haven't been taken, as well as recording those completed, along with their grades and credits. If this system is perfected, it

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should provide the kind of information displays for students on which they or anyone else can see whether a course has been, or is listed to be, retaken. If the students and counselors understand the automatic transferability of courses equated by faculty, as stated in the Articulation Agreement, then concern with successful transfer of courses may be redirected. That is, if all courses are properly prefixed and numbered by faculty discipline committees, then the transfer problems can be examined from the standpoint of whether courses are genuinely comparable and whether the community college transfer curriculum effectively articulates with the upper division university curricula. Both of these concerns are being examined now by some institutions with the Type II analytic products from SCNS. Before describing the usage of these products though, it is appropriate to reveal some of the problems discovered with the statewide implementation of a uniform set SCNS course identifiers.

First, it should noted that roughly 40% of the courses in the state course inventory went through a substantial change as a result of the universities converting from the quarter credit calendar to the semester credit calendar in 1980-1981. Many important and interesting curriculum changes occurred at the universities as a result of this shift. Partial and preliminary inquiry indicated that many faculty and academic administrators were very careful with the lower division courses (at the four-year universities); however, the conversion did not lead to a proportionate (e.g., one-third) decrease in the number of courses, although a nine percent reduction may have occurred. Whether this means course proliferation occurred during the changeover is anybody's guess. In any case, there are very definite instabilities in the SCNS course inventory which will be brought to light as the faculty

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task forces meet to examine the consequences of the conversion. Many course changes may have to be made in catalogs and computerized inventories over the next several years.

Another matter of substantial import is the legislative requirement, first stated in the 1980 appropriations act and now in the Course Numbering statutory law, that vocational courses are to be added to the SCNS course inventory. The organization of task forces to begin this assignment is currently underway. However, from the very beginning of the course numbering system, some non-postsecondary vocational courses have found their way into the course inventory; the problem with them is that the courses were entered into the system with college credit or institutional credit or some other substitute designation for credit. Initially, these may have been in-service vocational courses (e.g., police training or American Banking Institute courses). Some of them were included when a two-year or four-year college curriculum was institutionally authorized. The benefits of certification to those who took these courses, and then the related degrees, apparently legitimized their addition to the college and university curricula. This explanation is offered to indicate that some vocational courses are already in the SCNS course inventory, but are not readily identifiable as such. Just as this study began, it was discovered that several more vocational programs at community colleges were attempting to submit both thier postsecondary and non-postsecondary courses to Course Numbering and were stopped. All of these actions indicate that the course inventory system will undergo still another set of changes, which could be further augmented if and when non-postsecondary (e.g., adult continuing education) courses are equated with college level courses and entered into the System. Helping to clarify the problem of what constitutes a college credit course may

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be the report of terminological definitions which the Articulation Committee has been asked to submit by December 1982; the report was requested by the Florida Legislature in the 1982 Appropriations Act. The writer has been asked to help work on this report because of his 1980 study, Surrogate Learning Measures.

A concern with the quality of the information in the course inventory was found expressed in a number of ways by Course Numbering. When they have been asked to change a course and the course doesn't exist in the state inventory, the SCNS staff often find that the course was relatively new and had not ever been requested to be entered into the inventory. Although no clear evidence was found one way or the other, the omissions to the SCNS course inventory were thought to be quite small. The FSU institutional liaison officer made a special effort during the calendar conversion to match FSU catalog course listings with their portion of the state course inventory and to make both agree. Perhaps a periodic-triennial?-course audit by SCNS of each institution would be an appropriate strategy to insure that all courses are included in the SCNS. (One or two other institutions are now running cross checks between their authorized courses and those in the state inventory.)

Finally, three cases were found which posed significant challenges to the basic articulation concepts surrounding and underpinning Statewide Course Numbering. The first case was uncovered, and then confirmed, that a large community college had not converted all of its records to the use of the statewide course numbers. What made this so peculiar was that the universities were ordered to make the change in 1975 or face a $12 million penalty. The explanation given by an appropriate college administrator was that he wanted to keep a single institutional course identifier for each course which would not vary when the statewide identifiers changed. This too sounded peculiar and became more so when the

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local identifiers turned out to be the old institutional course numbers. This institution now has a new set of officers and they are working hard, I am told by the new SCNS director, to clean up the confused situation they inherited. (Incidentally, one other college was found with a serious problem: it had no liaison officer, but then the whole college was in an administrative uproar; it too is now trying to rebuild and learn about SCNS.)

In a second case, a university was found at which the institutional liaison officer to SCNS reported that top officials there had determined that no useful benefits were expected to come from common course numbering. This attitude became a self fulfilling prophecy when that liaison officer made no effort to inform counselors or deans about the products and services of the Course Numbering System. During the study, the head counselor for the largest professional school at this university sent this writer a particularly sincere and poignant lament about the deficiencies of course numbering. While attempting to gain permission to use this memo in the final evaluation report, it was discovered that the head man was no longer in charge and that the new head counselor with four years of experience knew nothing about course numbering. She even indicated that a microfiche reader was setting by her phone and that her staff kept charts of comparable courses, and such. This university, like the previous college, also has had some wholesale changes of academic leadership; the new persons have been seeking demonstrations of Course Numbering products and how to use the computer terminals to access the state course inventory and taxonomy files. When a long-time student affairs VP from this same university was given a full demonstration of the course information resources available to his university, the SCNS staff members present said he admitted he was astounded. (It should be

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noted that one state university was found to be without a liaison officer and the problems it was having reflected this. New officials here also have been appointed and the situation is improving.)

Finally, one of the state offices which could make substantial use of information about equated courses was found to be both unaware and unusing of it; this was the Teacher Certification Office. This situation too has changed; now, before equated courses are not accepted from different institutions for meeting the same certification requirement, consultations are held between Teacher Certification and SCNS staff. There probably is still much more which can be done so that SCNS outputs can be used effectively in the evaluation of teacher credentials. It is an interesting question whether this office is exempt from the automatic transferability requirements of equated courses as stated in the Articulation Agreement.

Use of SCNS Products and Services

In this section of the paper a summary will be given of the various classes of usages which were found of SCNS products and services. Some of these will overlap with a few of the items reported previously. However, it is the broad spectrum of usages and their relation to articulation which will be focused on here.

Eight classes of usages were found; a ninth class will be stated in this paper for the first time, although the basic information supporting it appears in the evaluation study report in a different chapter. The names of many of the persons and institutions involved are stated in the evaluation report; they are not listed here for the sake of brevity.

1. Admissions and registration. Common course numbering aids in evaluation of student transcripts - sometimes

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cutting evaluation time in half." During registration at a university, the temporary clerks sometimes learn that identical numbers mark automatically transferable courses, which permits the clerks to help students avoid retaking courses previously completed successfully.

2. Articulation and course comparability. By using course comparability reports from SCNS, a community college can monitor upper division university changes which would affect its students. The report clearly indicates the courses offered by lower division universities which are or are not offered by a college. A college with few comparable courses may make success difficult at the upper division for transfer students, i.e., students could be "held back" because they didn't have the correct prerequisites.

3. Creation of a Community of Scholars. The sponsorship by SCNS of faculty committees to number all courses in a discipline and the statewide discipline conferences helps create a statewide community of scholars, teachers, and counselors who can help transfer students obtain a quality education in the discipline of their choice within a normal time period, e.g., four years for a full-time student, or an equivalent amount of time for the regular part-time student.

4. Counseling and advisement. With the advent of computerized records and advising systems, based on statewide common course numbers, advisors can spend more time on academic

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problems and career counseling of students than on the mechanical aspects of planning a sequence of courses to fulfill curriculum requirements.

5. Curriculum analysis. A standard course numbering system and course equivalency tables or matrices make it possible to analyze the data to determine which institutions have similar and different programs, sub-specialties, and unique subject matters. It also reveals large concentrations of courses where no program degrees are offered.

6. Funding methods and student costs. Universities are funded in part by the level of course enrollments. The construction industry distributes the "education" portion of the state licensing fee to the universities for construction research and to the community colleges for teaching BCN prefixed courses. Duplicate course offerings, and their costs, can be assessed and justified when a sufficient student demand is evident.

7. Regional analysis and course comparability. Regional consortia of community colleges and universities can examine patterns of course comparability for the institutions in their service regions. Regional and state post-secondary planners can obtain readily the information about duplicate course offerings in areas or sections of the entire state. Industrial developers can analyze this information and point out to potential clients where particular training programs are located.

8. Maximizing student course transfers. When students and their parents understand the provisions of the Articulation

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Agreement relating to transferability of courses, they can then perform more rational program planning, i.e., through judicious selection they can maximize the number of transferable courses. The extent to which students do not have to retake courses at a second institution (which had been taken successfully at a first institution) should probably be considered an important indicator of the success of the SCNS and the workings of articulation between institutions in Florida. The Santa Fe Community College study results described earlier indicate how a college can use the system of common course numbers to examine the extent of its successful articulation with the public universities.

9. Scapegoating. A university professional school with a distinguished reputation and a successful record of preparing graduates who moved out to create many similar programs in Florida's community colleges blamed its enrollment decline on course numbering (and not on the new college programs which were closer to home and less expensive.)

Some new uses are emerging in response to new state requirements in the areas of postsecondary basic skills, general education, and professional licensing. This information comes from the new director of Course Numbering, Dr. Philip Goldhagen. He reports that several groups of postsecondary officials are exploring the possibility of using the third data base of SCNS, the course equivalency profiles, to

record the details of institutional compliance with these official requirements. For example, each college and university could identify the courses it would be using to require students to write 6000 words and have such information noted in the common course profiles. Similarly, those courses which each public institution indicates a student must complete before taking the sophomore test can be recorded on the course profiles. And, the same arrangement could be made for any courses which are designated as professional preparation, e.g., for the teacher certification exam, nursing exam, emergency medical technician exam, and so on. It seems obvious that the legal requirements may be uppermost in most peoples' minds, i.e., that evidence is compiled that someone was instructed in some subject matter before being tested over it.

In closing, it should be reported that the most deficient areas of usage of SCNS materials comes at the department level. The lack of awareness among department heads and their little use of the prime product distributed by SCNS, the microfiche of the course inventory and discipline taxonomies, indicates that a different product needs to be sent to university departments or schools so that the academic advisors can have access to them. At present, almost no SCNS products ever reach university departments: only seven percent of the total faculty respondents to the evaluation survey indicated they had ever used a microfiche. Furthermore, a full array of information about SCNS needs to be sent to the 400 non-medical university department heads just to clarify the most obvious points about what SCNS thinks its goals are and what it is not designed to do. The need here is great because even during the recent conversion of 22,000 or so university courses to the semester credit system, almost no Course Numbering products or services were used.

In sum, the Statewide Course Numbering System has been developed and institutionalized but it is now in a state of change and is badly in need of widespread diffusion of reliable information about it. Already the new director is making a substantial (and apparently, a successful) effort at spreading the word to top community college and university administrators. He asked that anyone in the audience wanting more information should give him or one of the four professional staff members a call at SUNCOM 278-6402 or Area 904, 488-6402.

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